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## The Legal Position of the Dubrovnik Republic against Turkey in the 15<sup>th</sup> and Early 16<sup>th</sup> Century and Its Efforts to Introduce the So-Called “Dubrovnik Duty” in 1521

### Abstract

The author’s aim was to analyse the legal situation of the Dubrovnik Republic and Dubrovnik merchants operating in the lands subject to the Sultans in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The conclusion was that in the early period the position was secured individually by obtaining *salvus conductus*. The imposition of vassal status on the Republic by the Turks (finally in 1458) was linked to the necessity of paying tribute, but at the same time there was a uniform regulation of the status of Dubrovnik merchants. During the reigns of Mehmed II and Selim, attitudes towards the Raguzans were hostile (increasing tribute, increasing customs duties) and merchants suffered oppression. The benevolent attitude of the young Suleiman resulted in the institution of the so-called Dubrovnik customs in 1521, whose favourable arrangements became one of the foundations of Raguzan prosperity under the protection of the sultans in the following century.

**Keywords:** Dubrovnik, Ragusa, Balkans, Ottoman Empire, “Dubrovnik duty”

Dubrovnik (Italian: *Ragusa*) is a city in southern Dalmatia, located about 250 km south of Split. Due to its coastal location and remarkable architecture (including an impressive medieval wall complex preserved in its entirety), it is one of Croatia’s biggest tourist attractions. Historian-researchers are attracted by Dubrovnik’s archives, whose richness can only be compared in the eastern Mediterranean to the collections gathered in the Athos monastery complex, but they are of a completely different nature<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The State Archive in Dubrovnik holds approx. 7 thousand books and 100 thousand separates, which are sources for the history of Ragusa from the late 13<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The collections stored in the Library of the Dominican Monastery, with 23 thousand volumes and 243 incunabula, and in the Library of the Franciscan Monastery, with 65 thousand volumes, including 206 incunabula and 2106 manuscripts, 3500 old prints from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, are also valuable. See M. Kratožil, *Dubrovnik libraries and archives*, Dubrovnik 1993, pp. 2–8; V. Foretić, *Dubrovački arhiv u srednjem vijeku*, “Anali”, vol. VI–VII, Dubrovnik 1959, pp. 315–335.



The history of Dubrovnik is fascinating<sup>2</sup>. Its origins are hazy. The city probably began as a Byzantine watchtower (*castellum*) on a rocky island (*Laus*), separated from the shore only by a narrow sea channel. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it was used as a refuge by Roman citizens fleeing from the incoming Slavs in nearby Epidaurum and the further away, but much larger Salona. The Roman population organised a defensive settlement on the island, which withstood a Saracen siege in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, in place of the original wooden palisade, the settlement was surrounded by stone walls. The importance of the local port, which was a stage on the important route along the eastern Adriatic coast running from Venice to Constantinople, grew. Gradually, relations with the Slavs living in the land hinterland were normalising<sup>3</sup>. At the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the sea channel was filled in, connecting the rocky islet with the mainland, and a wide street known as the *Plaza* (or *Stradun*) was created at this point to cut through the city centre from west to east. In the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the quarters and streets in the northern part of the town were marked out and were now covered by buildings<sup>4</sup>. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Ragusa was under the protection of Byzantium, and the city developed intensive maritime trade contacts, as evidenced by the agreements preserved in the Dubrovnik Archive from the 12<sup>th</sup> century: with Molfetta, Pisa, Ancona, Fano, Monopoli, Ravenna, Recanati, Bari and nearby Kotor<sup>5</sup>. Trade in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries also developed in the overland hinterland. It is reflected in the surviving agreements with the Lords of Bosnia and Serbia<sup>6</sup>.

The success of the Fourth Crusade, which gave the Venetians control over part of the Byzantine possessions, also determined the fate of Dubrovnik. From 1205, the city came under the control of Serenissima<sup>7</sup>. The 13<sup>th</sup> century is the period of the formation of the Raguzan *communitas* system, which shows a very strong Venetian influence. The Dubrovnik local government developed under the control of a representative sent from Venice – the comes (*comes*). The oligarchic system of the city, with the dominant role of dozens of aristocratic families (who owned land but were mainly involved in trade) was similar to the Venetian one (with leading bodies: Great Council, Council of Invitees – Senate and Small Council)<sup>8</sup>. In 1272, a set of city laws was written down, the *Statute of Dubrovnik*,

<sup>2</sup> Despite the abundant source material preserved and the announcements made by Croatian scholars over the past three decades, to date there has not been the complete, multi-faceted study of the history of the Dubrovnik Republic that the state certainly deserves. There are a few comprehensive overviews of varying value, but all of them give rather an outline of the history of Ragusa. See R. Harris, *Dubrovnik. A History*, Saqi London 2006; V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, vol. 1–2, Zagreb 1980; Carter F.W., *Dubrovnik (Ragusa); a Classic City State*, London 1972; J. Rapacka, *Rzeczpospolita Dubrownicka*, Warszawa 1977; L. Villari, *The Republic of Ragusa. An episode of turkish conquest*, London 1904; Engel J.Ch., *Geschichte des Freystaates Ragusa*, Wien 1807.

<sup>3</sup> J. Lučić, *Povijest Dubrovnika od VII stoljeća do godine 1205*, “Anali”, vol. 13–14, Dubrovnik 1976, pp. 5–38.

<sup>4</sup> L. Beritić, *Utvrdjenja grada Dubrovnika*, Zagreb 1955, pp. 9–20.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lučić, *Političke i kulturne prilike u Dubrovniku na prijelazu XII i XIII stoljeće*, in: idem, *Dubrovačke teme*, Zagreb 1991, pp. 56–59 and table 2.

<sup>6</sup> V. Foretić, *Povijest...*, vol. 1, p. 47, 89–90 and table 3.

<sup>7</sup> D.M. Nicol, *La quarta Crociata*, in: *Storia di Venezia*, vol. II: *L'età di comune a cure G. Cracco, G. Ortalli*, Roma 1995, pp. 155–180; N. Sołowjew, *Narodziny weneckiego imperium kolonialnego*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 312, 331–332.

<sup>8</sup> B. Krekić, *Dubrovnik and Venice in the thirteenth and fourteenth century: a short survey*, in: idem, *Unequal rivals*, Zagreb–Dubrovnik 2007, pp. 9–46; M. Medini, *Dubrovnik Gučetića*, Beograd 1953, pp. 22–39.

the original code of which is still preserved in the local Archive<sup>9</sup>. In 1332, the Great Council was closed (*serrata*). Only male descendants of noble families entered in the *Specchio* book were allowed to enter it from then on. This gave the nobles a monopoly on the government of Ragusa, jealously maintained until the fall of the city occupied by French troops in 1808.

Raguzan authority originally extended to the city – *civitas*, and *districtus* – the nearby areas outside the walls (the oldest of which formed the so-called Astarea). From the late 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century, the islands (*insulae*) Lokrum (with an important Benedictine monastery), Elafity (Koločep, Lopud, Šipan) and the remote Lastovo, acquired in 1252, were also included. In 1333, as a result of a grant from the Serbian ruler, the extensive Pelješac Peninsula (where the profitable salt works at Stona were later developed) was obtained, and in 1345 the large, but almost completely forest-covered island of Mljet. In 1399, the so-called Slansko Primorje was purchased from the King of Bosnia. The last acquisition was Konavle, obtained in two parts (in the years 1419 and 1427), so that the borders of the area controlled by Dubrovnik rested on the Bay of Kotor. The sovereignty of Ragusa was then given its final shape. It covered a strip of coastline about 80 km long and had, together with the islands, an area of about 1,300 km<sup>2</sup>. At the time of the demographic boom in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the city had a population of about 5,000–6,000 and the whole territory of 80,000 people<sup>10</sup>.

A landmark event in the history of medieval Dubrovnik was the Peace of Zadar in 1358, ending the first phase of Louis Andegaven's wars with Venice. Dalmatia then came under the rule of the King of Hungary. His sovereignty over Dubrovnik was rather nominal. The Raguzans were completely free to decide on the management of the city and to set the rules of their regime<sup>11</sup>. The rector, sent from Venice, was replaced by a rector, elected monthly from among the local nobility. The importance of the Council of the Invited (Senate), which, among other things, conducted foreign policy, was growing. The judicial and administrative apparatus was expanded, almost entirely based on nobles occupying seats on the Grand Council<sup>12</sup>. From 1419, the name Republic of Ragusa *Respublica Ragusina* and the white banner with St. Vlah (Blaise) began to be officially used in place of *Communitas*, whose feast day celebrated on 3 February became a great celebration, representing the power and sovereignty of the merchant republic<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> The latest Latin-Croatian edition with a comprehensive introduction by the eminent researcher N. Lonza: *Statut grada Dubrovnika sastavljen godine 1272 na osnovi kritičkog izdanja latinskog teksta B. Bogišića i K. Jirečeka priredili na hrvatski jezik preveli A. Šoljić, Z. Šundica I. Veselić*, Dubrovnik 2002.

<sup>10</sup> P. Wróbel, *Dubrovnik w latach 1358–1526. Organizacja przestrzeni*, Kraków 2010, pp. 187–188, 195–198, 215–217, 226–231, 243–247, 257–260, 267–269.

<sup>11</sup> Dubrovnik paid only a small tribute once every three years and the Hungarians did not even have a representative in the city. An extensive analysis of the Zadar Agreement in the context of the history of Ragusa was given by Z. Janeković-Römer / Cf. J. Radonić, *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, knj 1, sv. 1, Beograd 1934, pp. 86–95, 99–100; D. Dinić-Knežević, *Dubrovnik i Ugarska u srednjem veku*, Novi Sad 1986, pp. 17–19; Z. Janeković-Römer, *Višegradski ugovor temelj Dubrovačke Republike*, Zagreb 2003, pp. 10–48.

<sup>12</sup> A very detailed description of the system and municipal offices was given by a resident of Dubrovnik in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, Philip de Diversis, teacher and humanist. See: Filip de Diversis, *Description of Dubrovnik*, Kraków 2004, pp. 60–100.

<sup>13</sup> P. Wróbel, *Święta i uroczystości w XV wiecznym Dubrowniku w świetle Opisu Dubrovnika Filipa de Diversisa*, in: *Polska i Chorwacja w Europie Środkowej*, ed. by P. Żurek, Bielsko-Biala 2008, pp. 37–38.

Although crafts developed well in the town (in addition to the traditional ones: fishing, winemaking, leather and fur crafts, flax or salt crafts, also modern ones: wool processing, soap and glass production, etc.) trade was nevertheless key<sup>14</sup>. By 1358, the Venetians were restricting the Dubrovnikans at sea, so the Dubrovnikans developed land trade with Bosnia, Serbia and Bulgaria. Freed from Venetian control, the Raguzans experienced their economic “golden age” in the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries. A rapidly expanding fleet, competing with the Venetian one, now participated in the transport of Balkan goods to ports not only in Italy but throughout the Mediterranean. The trade in silver, gold, lead and copper became hugely important<sup>15</sup>. Despite its economic boom, however, the Dubrovnik Republic had very limited military potential. Meanwhile, the expansion of the Ottoman Turks into the Balkans progressed from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. As the Turks conquered more areas, it was not only the immediate threat that was approaching the borders of the Republic. The need to arrange relations with the Sultan in a way that would keep the Dubrovnik merchants active in their areas of commercial interest had already arisen much earlier. Gradually these areas came under Ottoman control.

Although Dubrovnikans travelling with goods in the Balkans came into contact with Turks very early on (probably as early as the 1460s), their legal status remained undefined for a long time<sup>16</sup>. Turkey, a Muslim state with an aggressive policy, did not yet have stabilised relations with any of the Christian states until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Even the Venetian and Genoese privileges, i.e. states with lands in the Levant, were only temporary. The first documents Dubrovnikans travelling in the Turkish Balkans received were of a *salvus conductus* nature. These were one-off guarantees of free movement and trade. In the case of disputes between Dubrovnikans, the Turks did not intervene until one of the parties turned to the kadi. He also became the judge in cases where the party was a Muslim<sup>17</sup>.

It is likely that collective guarantees for Ragusa merchants were already issued by Orchan and Murad I. However, it is only as far as Sultan Bayezid I is concerned that we know with certainty that in 1396 he allowed the Dubrovniks to trade freely in lands under his control<sup>18</sup>. The 1430 privilege of Murad II (1421–1451) is regarded as the actual legal basis for Dubrovnik-Turkish political and economic relations. It was issued during Dubrovnik’s conflict with the Bosnian lord Radoslav Pavlovic, who was a Turkish fief. In addition to a general safeguard against aggression from neighbours, the sultan guaranteed

<sup>14</sup> I. Božić, *Ekonomski i društveni razvitak Dubrovnika*, “Istoriski glasnik”, vol. 1–2, Beograd 1949, s. 21–61; F.W. Carter, *Balkan export through Dubrovnik 1358–1500: a geographical analysis*, “Journal of Croatian Studies” 1969, vol. 9–10, pp. 133–159; D. Roller, *Dubrovački zanati*, Zagreb 1951, pp. 5–170.

<sup>15</sup> B. Bojović, *Les grands siècles de Dubrovnik XVe–XVIe*, Belgrad 2023, s. 90–135; F.W. Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) ...*, pp. 220–237, 357–358.

<sup>16</sup> It is possible (albeit unproven) that the Dubrovnikans had already established contacts with the Turks while they were still in Asia Minor. K.A. Žukov, *Pervye kontakty Dubrovnika s tureckimi emiratami v Maloj Azji (vtorā polovina XIV v.)*, “Etudes Balkaniques”, vol. 2, Moskva 1989, pp. 109–113.

<sup>17</sup> The Sultan’s attitude towards the Dubrovnikans in the broader context of Koranic law is drawn by H. Inalçik. Cf. H. Inalçik, *Dubrovnik i Otomansko Carstvo*, in: *Zbornik diplomatske akademije*, br. 3, Zagreb 1998, pp. 113–114; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*, Beograd 1952, p. 15; M.M. Frejdenberg, *Dubrovnik i Osmanskaja imperija*, Moskva 1989, pp. 84–86.

<sup>18</sup> The sultan’s document (unfortunately not preserved to this day) was brought by Nikolai the Greek, a teacher at the Dubrovnik school. On its basis, the kadi of Gluhavica was to confirm to the Raguzans the right to travel and trade freely in the Sultan’s lands. See V. Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana*, Dubrovnik 2005, p. 11; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska ...*, p. 15.

in it the freedom of Dubrovnik merchants to operate in his lands<sup>19</sup>. The regularisation of the legal situation then became an absolute necessity, as the Turks were just then encroaching on areas of economic interest to the Dubrovnikans. At the same time, the Raguzans were making costly and lengthy efforts to obtain papal permission to trade with the infidels. The *Privilegium navigationis ad partes orientis*, obtained through the influential Dominican Jan Stojković at the Council of Basel in 1433, despite its name, was also relevant to Raguzan overland trade. It referred to consent for various activities related to trade and life in the colonies: transporting goods, maintaining contacts with infidels, building and maintaining churches or electing their own officials<sup>20</sup>. Naturally, Dubrovnik merchants had already dealt with this problem by individually seeking papal permission. From the point of view of the Republic's image in the West, the matter was important and the authorities sought confirmation of the *Privilegium* by successive popes<sup>21</sup>.

In 1442, three years after the first fall of the Serbian Despotovina (1439), Sultan Murad II imposed for the first time on Dubrovnik a tribute of 1,000 ducats, which, however, thanks to the efforts of Dubrovnik diplomats, was given the less explicit and humiliating form of a gift in silverware. The Sultan's privilege (*ahdname*), issued on this occasion at the request of the Dubrovniks, did, however, set out the mutual relations in very concrete terms. In addition to political guarantees, the Sultan made extensive concessions to Raguzan merchants. They were promised compensation for damage caused by the Turks and the Sultan's subject fiefs; full freedom to trade in the Sultan's lands on condition of payment of a 2% duty on goods sold; their own judiciary in disputes between Dubrovniks; a guarantee of the return of property of those who had died on the Sultan's land; freedom to travel even in wartime conditions<sup>22</sup>. Although the Dubrovnikans, in the turmoil of the Vladislav Varna crusade of 1443–1444, stopped paying the tribute, the very favourable terms of the agreement were still in practice in the following years<sup>23</sup>.

With the accession of Mehmed II (1451–1481) to the throne, a period of rapid Ottoman conquests in the Balkans began<sup>24</sup>. In 1455, the most important Serbian mining areas, headed by Novi Brdo, fell into the hands of the Sultan. Bosnia was also the object of constant invasions. Hostile measures against Dubrovnik merchants multiplied and it became obvious that if the Raguzans wanted to continue trading on the Balkan routes, they had to accept the Sultan's supremacy and agree to a tribute. Although this was treated as a great misfor-

<sup>19</sup> Researchers note that until 1430, the Dubrovnik authorities avoided official contacts with the Sultan fearing demands for tribute. Instead, relations with the Sandžakbe of Skopje were maintained with advantage. See B. Bojović, *Raguse et L'Empire Ottoman (1430–1520)*, Paris 1998, pp. 186–188; Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, 1–2, Beograd 1934, pp. 233–234; N.H. Biegan, *The Turco-Ragusan relationship according to the firmans of Murad III (1575–1595) extant in the state archives of Dubrovnik*, The Hague–Paris 1967, p. 26; B. Cvjetković, *Dubrovačka diplomacija*, Dubrovnik 1924, p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> This was a document obtained from the Council of Basel at the request of Sigismund of Luxembourg and Jan Stojković. See J. Radonić, *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, knj. 1, sv. 1, Beograd 1934, pp. 340–343; B. Krekić, *Dubrovnik and the Levant (1280–1460)*, Beograd 1956, pp. 37–38; B. Krekić B., *Dubrovnik (Raguse) et le Levant au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1961, pp. 295–237.

<sup>21</sup> I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska...*, p. 60 parable 18; D. Farlatti, *Illyrici sacri*, vol. VI, *Ecclesia Ragusina*, Venetiis 1800, pp. 180–181, 185.

<sup>22</sup> B. Bojović, *Raguse...*, pp. 190–194; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska...*, pp. 91–92.

<sup>23</sup> V. Foretić, *Povijest...*, vol. 1, p. 215.

<sup>24</sup> J.V.A. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth to the Ottoman Conquest*, Ann Arbor 1994, pp. 551–599.

tune in the Republic, in fact the annual tribute of 1,500 ducats imposed on the Dubrovnik Republic in 1458 was small. Of fundamental importance to the Republic, however, was the privilege issued by the Sultan<sup>25</sup>. It basically repeated the provisions of the 1442 document, as a result of a reprehensible oversight by the deputies it did not include the important point about autonomous courts between the Dubrovniks. However, as it turned out later, in practice within Turkey, the Raguzans settled disputes among themselves based on their own courts<sup>26</sup>. Unfortunately, according to the rules of Turkish diplomacy, the provisions of the document ceased to have effect after the sultan's death, triggering the need for future negotiations and creating the possibility for the Ottomans to impose a higher tribute<sup>27</sup>. To make matters worse, the local Turkish administrators repeatedly violated the treaty and the merchants of Ragusa were robbed. The High Port itself was also involved in the persecution. Unhesitatingly harassing and threatening to attack the city, Mehmed the Conqueror repeatedly raised the tribute to Dubrovnik, which rose from 1,500 to 10,000 ducats between 1458 and 1473. Soon the Sultan directly hit Dubrovnik merchants trading in his lands by raising the duty. Although in 1477 Mehmed "magnanimously" transferred the lease of this duty to the Dubrovniks, the Republic had to put up an additional 2500 ducats per year. However, this did not stop the Sultan from raising the tribute again in 1480, resulting in the Raguzans paying a total of 15,000 ducats. Dubrovnik came under strong immediate economic pressure, for even for the wealthy Republic this was already a substantial sum<sup>28</sup>. Most importantly, Mehmed the Conqueror's subsequent conquests made Turkey the only partner in Dubrovnik's land trade, with its possessions surrounding the Republic on all sides.

Mehmed the Conqueror's successor Sultan Bayezid II (1481–1512), blackmailed by the West over his brother Jem's case, eased the pressure. In a privilege of 1481, he reduced the Republic's tribute to 1,250 ducats while retaining (sometimes verbatim) the economic concessions the Dubrovniks had received in a document dated 1442<sup>29</sup>. The Porta could afford to make concessions in terms of trade, as the Turks showed limited economic activity in the Balkans at that time. The exchange was carried out by the Christian conquered population and, over time, by Islamised representatives of it, who did not change their occupation. Dubrovnikans, were therefore welcome. As vassals of the Sultan, they were not "outsiders" (like the Genoese or Venetians), and at the same time contributed to economic growth in the country. As a result, the privileges they enjoyed within the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century were greater than those of the Florentine merchants, who, among Westerners, then held the best position in Turkey<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> B. Bojović, *Raguse...*, pp. 196–198; Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske...*, I–2, pp. 236–240.

<sup>26</sup> A detailed analysis of the 1458 privilege and the legal consequences arising from it is given in B. Nedeljković, *Dubrovačko-turski ugovor od 23. oktobra 1458. godine*, "Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta" 1970, XI–1, pp. 363–392.

<sup>27</sup> K. Kostić, *Gradja za istoriju srpske trgovine i industrije*, "Spomenik" (SAN), vol. LXVI, Zemun 1926, pp. 136–138.

<sup>28</sup> M. Spremić, *Turski tributari u XIV i XV veku*, "Istoriski glasnik" 1970, br. 1–2, pp. 46–47; V. Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika...*, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> J. Freely writes in detail about the impact of the Jem case on Bayezid II's relations with the Christian states. See B. Bojović, *Raguse...*, pp. 259–263; Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske...*, I–2, pp. 284–286; J. Freely, *Jem sultan*, London 2004, pp. 67, 75, 78, 83–84, 92–93, 97–102, 105–112, 121, 125–132, 141–143, 154–157, 162–164, 176–181, 191–205, 219–222, 226–230, 238–241, 277–282.

<sup>30</sup> I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska...*, p. 222; *Dzieje gospodarcze i społeczne imperium osmańskiego 1300–1914*, eds. H. Inalcik, D. Quataert, Kraków 2008, pp. 197–208.

As Dubrovnik's position stabilised, the point of privilege allowing Raguzans to trade with other states even when Turkey was at war with them became particularly important. From as early as the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century, the Republic's highest income from trade was achieved during the Sultan's wars with the Christian states. Deprived of competition, the Raguzan merchants, as monopolists in the Balkans, supplied Turkey with Western goods, on the other hand they supplied Italy with the then sought-after goods of eastern provenance<sup>31</sup>.

Although Sultan Selim I (1512–1520) in 1513 confirmed Dubrovnik's privileges to the extent conferred by his father and approved a tribute of 12500 ducats, he soon changed his policy favourable to the Republic<sup>32</sup>. The drastic customs provisions introduced a few years later and the attempt to equate settled merchants in the colonies with the position of the *raja* threatened the "little stability" that Raguzans had achieved in its relations with Turkey over the previous two decades. It seemed that Selim was not going to continue to tolerate Dubrovnik's special status, which in the long run threatened to annex the Republic<sup>33</sup>. The republic was saved by the sultan's involvement in conquests in the south and then his unexpected death. Selim's successor the young and brilliant Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566) knew how to appreciate the benefits brought by the Dubrovniks<sup>34</sup>. Not only did he confirm the Republic's status as a vassal state and guarantee the position of merchants in its lands, but in a document of 1521, he also gave the Raguzanians the option of buying the duty in full, thus resolving one of the most serious obstacles to their trade in Ottoman lands<sup>35</sup>. Suleiman's decisions opened a new chapter in the history of Dubrovnik trade in the Balkans contributing to its flourishing in the next century. Key here was the introduction of the so-called "Dubrovnik duty".

All indications are that there was originally no uniform customs system in the nascent Ottoman state in the Balkans. The Turks levied duties in individual lands and fairs according to the rules that applied before their conquest. Among other things, this is indicated by Murad II's ferman of 1430, who proclaimed "...let them pay where there is what law"<sup>36</sup>. It can be assumed that after the arrival of the Turks, customs duties even decreased in many places. In view of the fear the invaders inspired, the best way to attract merchants was to lower the customs duty. In 1398, the Turkish administrator Paşagaik offered the Dubrovniks a reduction of duty by one third on condition that they continued to trade in his area<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> This is illustrated by the dramatic increase in the number of ships departing from Dubrovnik to Venice during the Venetian-Turkish War between 1499 and 1503: in 1499 – 25, 1500 – 35, 1501 – 44, 1502 – 114. The growth of Dubrovnik's customs revenues during the years of the wars for the period 1500–1700 is illustrated in a table by F.W. Carter. See T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*, Beograd 1973, p. 35; F.W. Carter, *Dubrovnik...*, p. 397.

<sup>32</sup> All previous Sultanic privileges were issued by the Ottoman chancellery in Slavonic with Cyrillic script. The 1513 document was the first to be issued in Turkish. See G. Elezović, *Turski spomenici*, vol. I, Beograd 1940, pp. 572–579; V. Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika...*, pp. 13–14; R. Harris, *Dubrovnik...*, pp. 97–98.

<sup>33</sup> T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik...*, pp. 96–100.

<sup>34</sup> A. Clot, *Sulejman Wspaniały i jego wspaniałe stulecie*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 45–60.

<sup>35</sup> S. Faroghī, *Polityka i zmiany społeczno-gospodarcze w imperium osmańskim w drugiej połowie XVI w.*, in: *Sulejman Wspaniały i jego czasy. Imperium osmańskie we wczesnej epoce nowożytnej*, eds. by M. Kunt, Ch. Woodhead, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1998, pp. 124–131; *Dzieje gospodarcze...*, p. 441.

<sup>36</sup> Č. Truhelka, *Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive*, "Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja", vol. XXIII, Sarajevo 1911, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> S. Milosavljević, *Izvozne carine koje su Dubrovčani plaćali Turcima za robu izvezenu iz Turske u vremenu od 1481 do 1520 godine*, "Istoriski Glasnik", Beograd 1953, p. 71.

Murad II freed Dubrovnik merchants from all other tributes except the 2% market duty, paid only on the goods sold. Meanwhile, in the Ottoman-unoccupied Zeta and Bosnia, Raguzans had to pay, in addition, other types of duties (e.g. transfer duties)<sup>38</sup>. After the occupation of Serbia and Bosnia, the Dubrovnikans were condemned to trade in Turkish territories. Mehmed could easily raise the duty, first to 4% (before 1475) and in 1476 to 5%, the amount that foreign merchants paid in his lands. However, from 1478 onwards, as already mentioned, the duty for Raguzan merchants was included as a lump sum in the annual tribute, which was raised by 2,500 ducats<sup>39</sup>.

Bayezid II in 1481 abandoned the export duty on goods from Dubrovnik altogether, which resulted in a reduction of the tribute by 2,500 ducats<sup>40</sup>. However, as early as 1484, the export duty reappeared in rather unclear circumstances. After the conquest of Novi, wanting to strengthen this city economically at the expense of Dubrovnik, the Sultan ordered that four articles, i.e. silk, wax, June (*cremexi*) and lead, should be transported exclusively there. From Novi they could be exported to Dubrovnik, but only after paying a 4% duty<sup>41</sup>. What is worse, overzealous and greedy Turkish customs officials arbitrarily tried to extend the duty to other articles as well. The authorities of the Republic put up a determined fight for the abolition of customs duties. In addition to diplomatic action, they tried economic pressure. They banned merchants from trading within Turkey and announced penalties for those who wanted to sell goods outside Dubrovnik. However, the Republic was too small to exert economic pressure on the giant empire and these efforts failed<sup>42</sup>. Dubrovnik's excellent diplomacy, however, demonstrated its effectiveness at this point. As a result of the measures taken by the MPs, the duty remained, but from 1485 onwards only one commodity exported by Dubrovnik citizens was charged with it, i.e. lead<sup>43</sup>.

The extremely favourable conditions under which the Dubrovniks traded in Turkey were, however, difficult to maintain in the long run. The costly war waged by the Ottomans against the Western states in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries forced the Sultan in July 1505 to introduce general and uniform export duties. Originally, the Sultan wanted to impose a 4% duty on the Dubrovniks, but an action to the Republic's well-paid partisans in the Port resulted in the eventual imposition of only a 2% duty on their exported goods. As a consequence, the Raguzans found themselves in a superior position not only to Florentine and Venetian merchants (who paid 4%–5% duty) but even Muslim merchants (3%)<sup>44</sup>.

The privileged position of Dubrovnik merchants not only irritated local Turkish financial officials, but severely hampered their work. Dubrovnik merchants were easily able to move goods of other Western merchants thus cheating the Sultan's treasury. Therefore, there were sometimes attempts to arbitrarily charge Raguzan with a higher duty. However,

<sup>38</sup> Ć. Truhelka, *Tursko-slovenski...*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> S. Milosavljević, *Izvozne carine...*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>40</sup> It is clear from the text of Bayezid II's document that this was not a reduction of the tribute, but the abolition of the duty. See Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske...*, I–2, p. 284.

<sup>41</sup> The purpose of this elaborate system was in fact not only to collect customs duties and revive trade in Novi but also to induce merchants to buy salt here, which was exchanged for the aforementioned four articles. See I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska...*, pp. 356–257.

<sup>42</sup> However, a positive settlement of the salt trade was achieved, which was a success for Raguzan diplomacy.

<sup>43</sup> Ć. Truhelka, *Tursko-slovenski...*, pp. 98–102; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska...*, p. 264.

<sup>44</sup> S. Milosavljević, *Izvozne carine...*, pp. 74–75.



the imposition of a 5% duty on Dubrovnik merchants in Pera and Constantinople, introduced in 1518, was certainly consulted with the Porta. Worse still, in the course of 1519 the new duty on Dubrovnik merchants began to be applied spontaneously across vast areas of the empire including Novi. Although, in response to protests from the Ragusa authorities, the Porta forced local officials to return to the old duties, the Sultan, by a separate berat, ordered Dubrovnikans in Pera and Constantinople to pay 5% and in Adrianople and Galipoli 4% of the value of the goods exported. Turkey was thus divided for the Raguzans into customs zones, which greatly restricted the freedom of action of Dubrovnik merchants<sup>45</sup>.

Persistent attempts by the authorities of the Republic to change the inconvenient situation only bore fruit after Suleiman the Magnificent took power. It is difficult to determine whether the idea of creating a so-called “Dubrovnik duty” was suggested by the Raguzans themselves, or whether it was part of a series of innovative solutions by the Sultan himself, aimed at improving the administration of the empire. The essence of the solution was to replace the disparate customs duties collected locally from Dubrovnik merchants by one collected in Raguz itself. Equally importantly, the collection of customs duties was to remain in the hands of the Dubrovniks themselves, as they were to lease them for a predetermined sum. This institution was absolutely fundamental to future Turkish-Dubrovnik relations. It became one of the pillars of Raguzan trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The fee system was organised and simplified, thus minimising the possibility of interference and abuse by bribed local Turkish officials. Admittedly, the first attempts to establish specific sums in 1520–1521 encountered difficulties, which delayed the implementation of the “Dubrovnik duty”. However, in the summer of 1521, on a wave of euphoria following the capture of Belgrade, Suleiman fully accepted this solution as well. It proved to be overwhelmingly beneficial to the Republic. Setting the amount of the three-year lease (*gümrük*) at 300,000 aspr, according to T. Popović, actually reduced to 1/6 the fees that the Raguzans had previously paid to the Sultan’s treasury for customs duties. The sum of the lease was additionally divided into six convenient instalments. Its amount was fixed, completely independent of actual trade flows, price changes or the decline in the value of the aspra. This created excellent conditions for Dubrovnik’s trade in Turkish lands, which developed without any restrictions in the following decades<sup>46</sup>.

The importance of the revenue from the “Dubrovnik duty” for the treasury of the Republic was so great that the authorities never allowed it to be publicly auctioned. They themselves arbitrarily decided on the person of the lessee, who was treated as a civil servant. In the interests of preserving good relations with the Sultan, a number of steps were also taken to prevent previously occurring frauds, e.g. the transportation of foreigners’ goods into Turkey<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> In the context of these events, S. Molosavljević’s claim that Selim II did not bring changes to the rules for calculating customs duties during his life was completely wrong Cf. T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik...*, pp. 96–98; S. Milosavljević, *Izvozne carine...*, p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> At the time, the Sultan did not just grant the request for a reduction in the tribute, but in view of the huge benefits the Dubrovnikans gained from customs, the issue lost its importance. See T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik...*, pp. 126–127.

<sup>47</sup> The first tenant of the “Dubrovnik customs” was elected at a secret meeting by a young port official, Nicholas son of Peter, who came from the island of Šipan. He served for a very long time from 1521 until his death in 1546. His father did business in Turkey and, knowing the language, served as a dragoman in the service of the Republic. See T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik...*, pp. 119–120.

Several conclusions seem to be drawn from the material presented above:

1. In the late 14<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the activities of Dubrovnik merchants from a Turkish perspective were of tangible benefit and they were tolerated in Ottoman-controlled areas. Relations were regulated by individually obtained *salvus conductus*.
2. From the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Turks imposed a vassal status on Ragusa, which involved the payment of a tribute, but at the same time regulated the legal position of its merchants. The repeatedly raised tribute reached its apogee at the end of Mehmed the Conqueror's reign. Harassment of the merchants multiplied at this time. This did not improve until the reign of Bayezid II, when the levy was reduced and the problem of customs duties was settled favourably for the Raguzans.
3. Sultan Selim's aggressive customs policy, especially towards the end of his short reign, again made things difficult for the Dubrovniks, although the legal status of their state did not change.
4. The benevolent attitude of the young Suleiman resulted in the institution of the so-called Dubrovnik customs in 1521, whose favourable solutions became one of the foundations of Ragusa's prosperity under the protection of the sultans in the following century.

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